



LAND & WATER CONSERVATION FUND PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act was authorized in 1965 (P.L. 88-578, 16 U.S.C. 4601-4-4601-11) and extended in 1987 through FY 2015 (P.L. 100-203). The original intent was to appropriate no less than 60 percent of the entire LWCF account for the stateside program, which is funded by offshore oil leases on federal land. But this balance has never been attained and, over the years, the Federal side of the program has eclipsed the stateside. For local communities trying to provide quality recreational areas close to home, the LWCF stateside program is a key tool. Demand for support of worthwhile, eligible projects in Massachusetts and across the country has far exceeded available funds. In Massachusetts, as in many states with overcrowded urban areas, the LWCF stateside program offers a crucial way to reclaim a small portion of the limited open space that remains, and to renovate recreational facilities that are seriously overused.

Funds can be used by the state (Departments of Recreation and Conservation and Fish and Game), as well as cities and towns to acquire and/or develop conservation and recreation land. Massachusetts has received \$92.3 million during since 1965. Land acquired or developed with these funds become protected under Article 97 and federal regulations - and cannot be converted from intended use without permission from the National Park Service and EOE. A converted site must be replaced with land of equal value not already in recreational use, and of equal utility to the converted site. Conversion proposals must also be approved by the National Park Service, through EOE, and land of equal value and utility substituted. Strict appraisal requirements apply using the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions.

By state requirement, a Massachusetts community must prepare a local open space and recreation plan that is updated every five years in order to be eligible for LWCF grants. The LWCF program itself requires states to prepare Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans and update them every five years in order to receive funds from the Federal government. These requirements help ensure well-thought out uses of land, and prioritization of projects.

The stateside program has been used successfully to aid in acquisition of conservation projects such as hunting and fishing sites, heritage corridors, greenways and riverways as well as funding the development of outdoor recreation facilities. The LWCF program makes an important contribution to the protection of wildlife habitat, water quality, farmlands, and archaeological sites as well as providing a quality outdoor recreation experience.

Past projects funded through the stateside program in Massachusetts include Boston Common and Franklin Park in Boston, state Heritage Parks in Holyoke, Lynn, Lowell and New Bedford, areas in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, and the historic Paine Estate in Wayland.

The impact of these protected conservation and recreation areas can be evaluated in human as well as environmental terms. LWCF projects play an important role in improving the quality of life in many communities by providing access to sites that are close to home and can be enjoyed regardless of mental or physical disability. Inner city residents acknowledge that park and recreation areas offer a positive alternative to crime and gang violence. They also help people to learn to appreciate the value of protecting natural resources, since positive results can be seen in one's own neighborhood.

The LWCF program was purposefully designed to ensure that the local project sponsor (a municipality or state agency) makes a clear commitment to the project. The program only pays up to 50 percent of the total project cost, and many projects have required the local sponsor and neighboring private interests to invest much more than 50 percent. For example, it was estimated that the Lechmere Canal project in Cambridge leveraged ten private dollars for every single public dollar spent. Furthermore, maintenance costs are solely the responsibility of the local sponsors, and future grants are withheld if grantees cannot demonstrate an ability to care for the federally assisted sites they already have.

This is a cost-effective partnership program that is making a big difference with very limited funds. While the grant source is federal, the program is largely administered on the state level resulting in a more timely and efficient delivery system. DCS has long advocated that the LWCF program is flexible enough to cover many of the initiatives that have been popular such as protecting greenways, riverways, and priority watershed lands and redeveloping brownfields. It is much more efficient to use an existing program with some modifications than it is to reinvent entirely new programs.